Memory Games for MS

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How Cognitive Rehabilitation Can Counteract Memory Problems

Some medications can help overcome problems with thinking, remembering and problem-solving that come with MS. But while disease-modifying drugs (DMDs) may alleviate symptoms by protecting against new brain lesions, no medication has been found to completely halt or reverse cognitive effects.

Experts recommend cognitive rehabilitation exercises as a complement to your MS medication, which can be a quick and fun mind game, or a lengthy date with a complex puzzle. Activities involving patterns, visualization and recollection seem to target the principal cognitive problems best.

Understanding How MS Affects Memory

Up to half of all MS sufferers will eventually suffer from some mild cognitive problems, but between 5% and 10% of patients experience problems with thinking, memory and problem solving that severely impact lifestyle and independence. Although odds are low, a cognitive disability is something every MS sufferer will want to avoid.

The amount of thinking and memory impairment you experience is not related to the progression of your physical symptoms, but certain elements can indicate you may have more cognitive trouble:

- **Number of lesions on the brain –** An MRI will reveal the amount and extent of brain lesions, and the more numerous and widespread they are, the greater the cognitive impairment.
- **Type of MS –** Although any of the specific forms of MS can bring some cognitive changes, progressive MS often brings more thinking impairment.
- **Flare ups –** When you're experiencing an MS exacerbation, your risk for fuzzy thinking, problems focusing, and failing memory spikes.

Best Types of Memory Games for MS Patients

Certain games are great for memory building, keeping you engaged and interested as you strengthen aspects like concentration, thought processing and verbal memory (the ability to recall words). Restorative exercises aim to improve impaired mental abilities, and you'll find this approach in games like:

- **Memorizing word lists –** The idea is to memorize the words on a list by reciting them numerous times, and eventually, you'll begin to increase the challenge by adding more words to the list. The same concept applies to memory games involving matching images.
- **Brain Age –** A handy selection of quick and fun games designed by Nintendo, Brain Age has had noticeable effects on cognitive ability in recent studies. The game offers a selection of short exercises, so it's easy to play a few every day (and daily practice will lead to greater improvement).
- **Lumosity –** All you need to access Lumosity.com is an internet connection, and there's even an app to use on your smartphone. Regular practice can improve thought processing, memory and reaction time,

and you can tailor your own training program to the specific challenges you face (such as remembering sequences, keeping track of information, and recalling names and faces).

- **Jigsaw puzzles –** Traditional jigsaw puzzles harness both the left and right sides of your brain to strengthen your visual-perceptive skills. Also, focusing on the image while you put together a jigsaw puzzle can be meditative, calming your mind and naturally strengthening concentration.
- **Crosswords –** Several studies have shown that working at crosswords — combined with an active lifestyle — can lengthen lifespan. While there is no proven link between MS and Alzheimer's, doing crossword puzzles can help protect against dementia and other memory disorders associated with aging.

Training your memory is important, but learning to adapt your approaches to daily tasks can also make life easier, helping you to stay happy and independent. These are known as “compensatory strategies”, and they aim to work around cognitive impairments, instead of against them. Studies suggest that combining restorative and compensatory approaches will return the greatest improvements, not only for your cognitive health, but also for your emotional wellbeing.